



Seventeen years after closing its doors, Spritzer and Fuhrmann hold their first reunion

For decades, one of the most famous jewelry centers in the Caribbean, enjoying a worldwide reputation for quality of its inventory was Spritzer and Fuhrmann, located on the main street of Oranjestad. They opened their first store in 1930 in Oranjestad, then another in San Nicolas in 1939. They finally closed for business in 1990, and since that time, the many employees that worked their faithfully for years, “have seen each other at various funerals, but have never gathered simply for a reunion. It was time,” reports reunion organizer Hedy Slikker.

Over two hundred former employees with their families enjoyed a festive night at the Arawa Waterpark in Moko on Saturday, June 30. Assisting Hedy in organizing the lovely party were other former S & F employees, Patricia (Tita) de Lange, Rose Kock and Lola Vrolijk. They greeted the many that attended with a sculpture of the central store on the Nassaustraat that opened in 1949, which was of a classic deco art design, complete with the famous clock that used to ring the hour by playing music.

A booklet compiled by Glenda Reiziger, detailing the history of S & F was distributed to each as they entered. It tells the tale of Charles Fuhrman, a Jewish goldsmith from Romania who escaped persecution by emigrating to Aruba, then finally settling in Curacao.. There he met Wolf Spritzer, a Hungarian watchmaker who also had relocated to the Netherlands Antilles to make a life free of religious persecution and had a tiny shop on the island since 1927. Working together to make a living through the difficult depression years, they traveled to Aruba and sold clocks and watches door to door, and as they prospered, they opened their shop, plus a second in Curacao, that island’s first modern jewelry store.

After the Second World War the fame of Spritzer and Fuhrman spread around the world, and Spritzer & Fuhrmann grew to include thirty-three retail outlets and boutiques with over 550 employees on Curaçao, Aruba, Bonaire and St. Maarten. Finally, just off Fifth Avenue, an S & F boutique graced midtown Manhattan, and items purchased at any of the Caribbean affiliates could be repaired there, free of charge.

Charles Fuhrman had married the daughter of his partner, Wolf, who died in 1953. At this time, Fuhrman expanded the jewelry workshop and trained locals in jewelry design rather than import labor. He often sent them out of the islands for specialized courses to improve their skills. This dedication to training local staff became a store hallmark, and in later years Charles Fuhrmann also became known for promoting the general education of local youth. In 1977, when Spritzer & Fuhrmann celebrated fifty years in the local retail business he eschewed an expensive jubilee gala (although he held an elegant internal celebration) and instead chose to donate a sizeable sum to several local youth foundations in Curacao and Aruba.

Spritzer & Fuhrman were honored by the Netherlands Antilles by the issuing of a commemorative stamp in 1977. Considered pioneers of tourism to the region, Charles Fuhrman was made a Knight of the Order of the Netherland Lion, the highest civilian honor, by Queen Juliana in the late eighties. He passed away in 1988.

Joining the gathering for the evening was the living Charles Fuhrman, accepting the booklet and gratitude of the many employees that celebrated their wonderful memories of many years with the store. The booklet contains various memoirs of these dedicated and loyal employees, recounting the history of the store in personal anecdotes. Some of them, such as their first employee Velma Henriquez, had been a part of the “family” for a very large portion of their lives, and this first reunion was for many, a “family” reunion, appropriately marking the 80th anniversary of the opening of the first store.